



# **Building Community University Engagement: A Program Theory Approach**

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## **Abstract**

The Queensland University of Technology (QUT), like other Australian Universities, is seeking to advance collaboration across external boundaries through “community engagement” in response to policies at National and State levels that invoke rationales such as resource efficiency and coherence in regional educational delivery. As a result, an alliance of regional education sector providers including QUT established the Northern Corridor Education Precinct (NCEP) in 2001. The alliance recognised that no individual provider, organisation or community can fully deliver a complete learning experience in isolation. In an environment of changing education landscape the NCEP has reaffirmed that it exists to develop and provide cross-sectoral leadership by introducing and maximising a co-ordinated approach to learning for our community.

While these goals have been formulated as a means of operationalising regional level initiatives, QUT’s articulated organisational strategic requirement is to identify and operationalise ‘best practice’ standards. Meaning a clearer framework and model are needed to articulate the logic analysis processes and desired outcomes of collaboration. This is a complex task with university engagement policy articulated at three levels of governance national, state and specific university level. Thus it is necessary to examine the policy logic at each of these levels to identify the relationships assumed to be at stake in bringing about community engagement.

In order to do this the paper first begin to explore the concept of program theory as a level of analysis suited to identifying the logic of policies and their implementation in programs. Secondly, the paper examines the current national and state education sector policies developing a framework of the articulated policy, as desired outcomes and mechanisms. The QUT strategic vision and logic of collaboration, QUT Blueprint 2004 is also examined from an organisational and systemic context. As a result of the examination, this paper outlines the articulated logic underpinning the three levels of policy informing community engagement strategies and identifies the relationships and the emerging articulated language and rhetoric.

Thirdly, a brief examination of research around education sector engagement identifies a conceptual gap in the mechanisms and application for such initiatives. It is suggested that in the context of the development of learning regions in a knowledge economy, universities have a leadership role at the level of ideas and values and that, ‘boundary spanning’ is required as a means of achieving the collaborative relationships identified in policy.

The paper argues that in order to undertake regional, collaborative, cross-sectoral education and community engagement a conceptual framework that identifies the processes and issues involved is needed. The proposal is raised and will be developed further in subsequent papers that ‘boundary spanning’ and sectoral, community interface occur at a symbolic dimension and the work of Benedict Anderson on “Imagined Communities” informs this process and allows a working framework to emerge.

This framework will reflect the work in the NCEP over the past three years as vehicles to create in the words of Donald McNeill (2001) “Spaces of Engagement” in which community engagement can occur. The paper proposes that this approach sheds new light on the processes of organisational boundary spanning that need to occur if universities are to engage with their constituent communities. This represents one way to fill the identified process gap and transcend the strategic operational divide.

**Keywords:** Community Engagement; Programme Theory; Collaboration; Higher Education Policy Framework.

## **Programme Theory and Logic Models**

Programme Theory emerged about thirty years ago from the evaluation discipline and Friedman (2001) discusses how it has gained wide acceptance as an important concept for understanding programme workings and assessing their effectiveness. In Baldwin et al (2004), Rogers (2000) who describes Programme Theory as “an explicit representation of the ‘mechanism’ by which programme activities are understood to contribute to the intended outcomes.” and Chen and Rossi (1992) define it as a framework that guides practice and is “a specification of what must be done to achieve the desired goal, what other important impacts may be anticipated and how these goals and impacts could be generated.”

This result is achieved by establishing the links between what programmes assume their activities are accomplishing and what is actually happening. Baldwin et al (2004) proclaim these frameworks are more than just flowcharts because they explain, “...how programme activities are understood to lead to intended outcomes” and “...convey what it is about the programmes that help to bring about the goals”. These links can then provide a guiding framework for systematic programme evaluation.

This method involves the identification of the underlying logic by which a programme is supposed to produce its intended outcomes. Mapping successive steps of measures, throughputs, outputs and outcomes and identifying the mechanisms or mediators by which the desired changes are expected to occur achieve this. Allowing for a shared understanding of the nature of the programme, its measures, intended effects and the working logic required for operational effectiveness, creates confidence that an intervention actually works and that it triggers the expected outcomes.

Without an understanding of the articulated theory and underlying assumptions of the desired change as discussed by Hernandez (2000) it would be impossible to compare and contrast actual and expected outcomes. The understanding and use of the interrelationships between client and system conditions, service strategies, indicators and outcomes allow for an examination of why results occur and can lead to improved programme delivery and quality. Baldwin et al (2001) explain Programme Theory links theory and practice and hypothesize how programmes work and that since programmes are multifaceted they may need to occur over time as part of a repetitive process. As outlined by Dahler-Larsen (2001) it is expected that some contexts are more hospitable to certain programme mechanisms than others.

When implementing any intervention, an understanding of how, why and when programmes work assists goal achievement and also effectiveness evaluation at multiple levels.

Douthwaite and Schulz (2001) discussing Kuby (1999) argue that “the gap between the direct benefits a project might have and development outcomes” are in Kuby’s language an attribution gap “because it becomes virtually impossible to link project outputs with highly aggregated benefits” through any impact assessment. Kuby continues by detailing how Programme Theory is just another name for what is labelled a “plausibility bridge”. Therefore, the “construction of a plausibility bridge between the two islands of knowledge – the development results evaluation and the project evaluation.... would be a plausible explanation of how the project might have contributed to the changes in the development situation.” The paper further argues that the advantage of building the plausibility bridge or programme theory at the beginning of a project is that potential success can be assessed and it can be used as a guide to process, implementation, indicators, change strategy management and evaluation.

How a programme on one side might have contributed to changes at the relationship, collaboration and network levels that exist on the other side of the attribution gap, as part of Programme Theory is one of the issues that attracted my initial attention to and has application for my examination of higher education community engagement. Programme Theory allows for the creation of logic maps that depict the articulated context and outcomes, incorporating potential evaluation and review accounting for the process. The logic maps would then act as systematic incremental guides to understand what is being attempted, at what stage the process is at and constantly measure against progression milestones and desired short and long-term outcomes.

Programme Theory has been chosen to provide a structured path to explore the articulated systemic higher education engagement policy and legislation for this paper for that reason and also to provide a constant method throughout subsequent papers. Initially, Programme Theory provides the framework at the mapping level to understand contextual, strategy, mechanism and the expected outcome and later develop understanding of the interrelationships, shared development of indicators as the plausibility bridge for programme evaluation at the various systemic levels. Informing the programme delivery, subsequent process designs and evaluation loop.

## **Review of Community Engagement Policies Context**

Regional and urban university campuses have multifaceted roles within the community. Not only are they the site of traditional tertiary learning and possibly research, but also each is usually one of its region’s major employers and economic drivers as well as cultural, recreational, infrastructure and resource providers.

A growing emphasis is being placed on the need for the education sector to engage with community in a meaningful and mutually beneficial way. Both in Australia and internationally, governments, the institutions and communities are looking at how the resources and potential of such relationships can be unlocked. Many definitions of both community and engagement exist but in this work; Community Engagement is simply the process by which the articulated outcomes specific to identified communities are achieved. In other words Community Engagement is the mechanism.

In Queensland, Australia, Education Sector Community Engagement Policy has emerged with national and state level systemic changes occurring concurrently.

The national level “Nelson” Higher Education Reforms (Nelson Reforms) and the state level “*Education Training Reform for the Future*” (ETRF) both evolved from a joint declaration labelled “*Stepping forward – improving pathways for all young people*” signed by all national and state education, employment, training, youth affairs and community service ministers. That declaration details a systemic change initiative as part of the examination of the formal education framework and gives broad direction to education reform and specifically for this paper, education sector community relationships.

Supporting the systemic process, of building university-community engagement will be an examination of the organisational level framework adopted and implemented by one tertiary institution, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). It translates the systemic and institutional direction to a strategic organisational level, which in turn supports and defines its coalface interactions with community.

This paper results from reflections on the QUT role in the Northern Corridor Education Precinct (NCEP). Through the NCEP formerly divergent community groups and the regional education sector now have a structured point of contact into and within education and learning and also a process for developing meaningful relationships amongst themselves. One of the main strengths of the NCEP is the open and representative nature of the NCEP Steering Committee, which includes both practitioners and decision makers. The collaborative and sectoral outlook of the group opens up dialogue and innovation, which is historically difficult to achieve in a more traditional model and was outlined in Delaforce and Buckley (2002, 2003).

## **Structural Reform**

### ***MCEETYA***

Analysis of the structural reforms in this paper concentrate on education sector community engagement as the way to contextually base the work.

In July 2002 ministers from around the country signed a declaration through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, Youth Affairs and Community Service (MCEETYA) committing to principles outlined in “*Stepping forward: improving pathways for all young people*”. From the declaration MCEETYA developed an action plan that specifically “*includes ways of strengthening community support for young people through partnerships across all levels of government and with local communities*”

The collaborative, cross-jurisdictional and cross-portfolio creation of the declaration represents the underpinning concepts of engagement, partnership and community support articulated in the document. This is evidenced by the signatory coverage of the MCEETYA declaration which includes ministers responsible for all levels of formal education in Australia involving the higher education, vocational, secondary and primary sectors.

In the MCEETYA action plan the following key areas emerged:

- education and training as the foundation leading to pathways for effective transition for all young people;
- access to career and transition support;
- responding to the diverse needs of young people;
- promulgating effective ways to support young people and
- focused Local Partnerships and Strategic Alliances.

The articulated key areas from the action plan are further supported by a series of principles that recognise in the words of the plan that *“Partnerships share the load and increase possibilities and opportunities.”* These key areas:

- focus on the interests of young people;
- collaborate and co-operate across sectors;
- communicate, consult and collaborate;
- promote partnerships and networks;
- connect and ensure coherence;
- participate meaningfully and
- evaluate and review.

An analysis of the MCEETYA documentation reinforces, particularly in relation to educational sector community engagement, that educational institutions should: actively and meaningfully participate in their communities; collaborate and communicate within and between each other, broader agencies and community; optimise the delivery of learning and learning pathways particularly for young Australians through integration and facilitate informed decision making.

With the agreement of all relevant state and federal ministers a national level agenda had been set. This agenda committed any future reforms to incorporate cross-sectoral, cross-jurisdictional and community engagement components in the systemic national and state level educational reforms processes noted above. Since the MCEETYA declaration in 2002 significant reforms have been undertaken using a traditional community and stakeholder consultation involving distribution of a discussion paper, public consultation and finishing with legislative endorsement at both national and state levels.

#### ***Australia: Nelson Reforms - Higher Education at the Crossroads***

Throughout 2002 the Federal Department of Education Science and Technology (DEST) under the direction of the Minister Dr Brendan Nelson published a series of discussion papers. Four papers in particular set the higher education sector framework for engagement within the sector and with community. These are the:

- *“Higher Education at the Crossroads – An Overview Paper”* April 2002;
- *“Striving for quality – learning, teaching and scholarship”* June 2002;
- *“Varieties of excellence – diversity, specialisation and regional engagement”* July 2002 and
- *“Varieties of learning – the interface between higher education and vocational education and training”* August 2002.

These papers in concert with *“Our Universities Backing Australia’s Future”* released by DEST in May 2003 detailed the national reforms and direction of the higher education sector and articulated the underpinning of community engagement. Specifically in section 9 of that document under the title *“Enhancing collaboration and structural reform”* a call is made for *“more collaboration between universities and other education providers, industry, business, regions and communities.”*

The initial national priority areas for collaboration detailed were:

- in course provision between two or more institutions;
- between vocational education and training provider/s and an institution in course provision or in an area related to teaching and learning;
- between universities and their communities, particularly, but not exclusively, regional communities and
- between universities and business/industry/employers and or professional associations.

The flavour and language of the MCEETYA declaration principles flow through the Nelson Reforms. The themes of cross-sectoral collaboration and interface, regional grounding, relationships between institutions and the community permeate all the documentation. Community involves businesses, professions and industry, student movement and choice, shared resources and facilities, mutuality of both process and outcome and collaborative research. Analysis and overlay of the above principles and reforms show that at a policy level governments are seeking to create a systemic environment that supports education engagement both within the sector and with the community. This pathway for higher education while clearly flagged at the policy level has not been readily operationalised nor indeed have the links been translated uniformly from the systemic policy level to regional and institutional strategic levels at this time.

### ***Queensland: Education and Training Reforms for the Future***

The final piece of the systemic policy puzzle is at the state level where in Queensland under the Smart State banner the *“Education and Training Reforms for the Future A White Paper”* was released in November 2002. This document was also leveraged from the *“Pitman and Gardiner reports”* released by the government in August 2002. Again the rhetoric, language and timing are similar to both the Nelson Reforms and MCEETYA declaration. In fact a number of references are made to the MCEETYA declaration including a statement that the Queensland government will embed the intent of the declaration into legislation.

Queensland has however injected the concepts of life long and work integrated learning more deeply into the debate.

Here they talk of the need to:

- prepare the students' learning throughout their lives including the skills and passion to achieve this objective;
- build partnership linkages across the sector;
- build partnerships at the local level;
- build new relationships that draw on the best from across our communities;
- coordinate program and services at the local level and use resources more efficiently across sectors;
- improve collaboration between schools, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and universities and
- foster the special roles of industry and business because they can provide work experience and ultimately jobs.

The ETRF also goes a step further with local networks identified to play a key role in the development of District Youth Achievement Plans to be developed in collaboration between state schools, non-state schools, TAFE institutes, other representatives of vocational education and training providers, universities, youth services and the Commonwealth.

These reforms for the future call for an understanding of the local environment, factors that influence transition through education and on to work, analysis of the local economy and transport, youth employment, education and training patterns, analysis of existing service programs and risks.

### **Funding patterns from governments**

Following the MCEETYA declaration there has been a noticeable movement at both the national and state level to reform the education sector. This is seen through the discussions, consultations and legislative reforms detailed above.

Associated with this has been an alignment of the funding models to reflect the articulated policy direction involving aspects of engagement across, within and outreach from the education sector. For an extended period issues such as resource allocation, duplication and quality of service, and corporate citizenship have been discussed, reported on and adjusted on the margins. It seems clear that the public investment in the education sector will be allocated based on the framework that has emerged in the past two years with additional pools of funds directly available to facilitate sectoral engagement and collaboration. Clearly the unified national and state agenda has been agreed upon with education sector community engagement identified as a responsibility for the sector to achieve the articulated outcomes for the individual institutions, regions and jurisdictions involved. How does the sector do this, now and in the future and does an appropriate model exist?

### ***Institutional Planning - QUT***

To begin, the articulated institutional strategic direction of the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in which my work is based will be discussed as the point of interface between sector policy and organisational operationalisation.

QUT throughout 2003 and 2004 has developed a series of interrelated strategic and operational plans designed to guide the university for the next five years. Embedded in them is the vision articulated in the university's strategic plan *"The Blueprint 2004"* for QUT to be a university *"engaged with our communities"*.

Engagement with our Northern Corridor community emerges in the broadest sense with the top-level university plans embedded under the strategic plan. In particular the *"Learning and Teaching and Research and Innovation Plans"* adopt and articulate the ideas of active partnership and collaboration, internal and external engagement, capacity building, shared facilities and research benefit to the community and more.

To support those words QUT in its *"People and Culture Plan"* states, *"QUT will develop a culture of partnership and engagement"* part of which will be the review of best practice models for community engagement.

### ***Articulated Policy Framework***

Collectively what has emerged in relation to sector engagement is an integrated national legislative and policy model supported at least in Queensland where the QUT example is beginning to be incorporated into other institutional articulated policy and planning.

These reforms represent a modern generational systemic attempt to align the education sector at all levels with community, business and each other. This building of relationships networks, collaborations, partnerships, mapping, understanding and actively becoming members of their community, sharing and resource usage maximisation are all part of a new language.

This new language has emerged not only from the systemic policy documentation and legislative reforms but is one that now provides a coherent framework for interplay between and within the education sector, the community and beyond. What has occurred is a bipartisan strategic vision for the education sector reflected from jurisdiction to jurisdiction in which not all are the same, but are able to be integrated at the operational and collaborative level. When examining the policy documentation, the rhetoric, language and intent are impressive. The sectors are intended to work cohesively, sharing and leveraging information from each other for a community. Infrastructure usage is maximised and the scarce public dollar effectively spent to the benefit of all active parties and aspects of the community.



What is not in the systemic policy is how this can be achieved? How is the translation from policy and legislation to education sector collaboration and community engagement to be undertaken at the institutional, regional, sector and national level and beyond?

To this point the emergence of a systemic model has been described as a 'what to do' not 'how to do' process. Given that a systemic policy model has emerged a brief review of the education sector community and engagement literature is required to locate any operational or conceptual models.

Below is a précis of the articulated policy framework as it currently stands with respect to education sector community engagement. As documented above a common rhetoric and direction has emerged across the system. But the gap clearly portrayed in the framework is that **no mechanism to undertake the task is identified**. This is not a negative viewpoint for it allows regional and organisational responsiveness to reflect upon uniqueness of circumstance.

The table below represents the layering of the various articulated policy frames into a common form designed to begin the construction of the contextual frame for higher education community engagement. This framework consists of the programme activities and the intended outcomes articulated through the systemic legislative and policy documents and the intended mechanisms as part of an emergent programme theory. Understanding the contextual framework will allow the development of an appropriate version of the Kuby plausibility bridge, which spans the attribution gap and allows the benefits detailed above to emerge.

### Articulated Policy Framework

	Policy	Mechanism	Outcomes
MCEETYA	Action plan, education & training, interests of young people, collaboration, cooperation, communication, consultation, partnerships, networks, coherence		Pathways, transitions, career support, diverse needs, focused local partnerships, strategic alliances, collaborate & cooperate across sector, participate meaningfully, evaluate & review
Nelson	Collaboration and structural reform, course provision, regional communities	Funding Model	Multi institutional course provision & collaboration, universities engage communities, regional communities, business/industry, professional assoc
ETRF	Partnerships, coordinated programs, resource efficiency across sector and locally, role for business and industry	Funding Model, District Youth Achievement Plan	Lifelong skills & passion for learning, partnership linkages across sector and locally, draw on community skills and resources, coordinate program services, improve collaboration
QUT Blueprint	Engage, regenerate and experiment in learning and teaching, research and innovation and people and culture	Review best practice model, benchmark results	Active partnerships and collaboration across internal/external boundaries, integration, transitions, sustainability, international, capacity, thematic, responsive, culture of partnership & engagement, flexibility

A tool for explanation at a practitioner level the framework above has condensed the systemic policy for higher education community relationships into a programme theory and logic model that portrays the context, programme activities and intended outcomes. This in turn allows work to begin on the measurement and evaluation of the success both codified and tacit results. Yet, the process, mechanism or mediators do not emerge as readily. Remembering that our initial definition for this paper was community engagement is the process by which the articulated outcomes specific to identified communities are achieved.

The paper now turns briefly to examine work on the types of relationships, models and discussions about education sector engagements already in place in Australia and internationally. How are these funded, operationalised, staffed, structured and perceived? How does it all work?

## **Research on education sector community engagement**

Educational institutions generally espouse that they are engaged with communities in their many guises. Delving a little deeper, this means many different things within and between higher educational institutions.

Briefly, reviewing information from around the world and in Australia it becomes clear that community engagement and relationships occur throughout education institutions and they are initiated, driven and sustained in many different ways. The purpose of this paper is not to restate those works but to filter for existing processes and see if types of relationships and collaborations exhibit framework transitions from the systemic to the operational.

### ***International Research***

A review of works internationally identified a number of positive outcomes on which casework had been completed, but again no documented model translating systemic direction to operational engagement emerged. It becomes difficult when dealing internationally with the significant jurisdictional variances. However, the work of the Kellogg Foundation and the Service Learning Clearinghouse informs the process, as do the case studies and stories told, the published works and the many of articles put out in the publications such as the Metropolitan Universities Journal all contribute segments to the story.

The work by Burkhardt (2002) on *"Boundary-Spanning Leadership in Higher Education"*; Letven, Ostheimer and Stratham (2001) on *"Institutionalising university community engagement"*; Bringle and Hatcher (2002) *"Campus-community Partnerships: The Terms of Engagement"* and Schoem's (2002) work *"Transforming Undergraduate Education"* all add to the debate.

Aligned works not specifically related to the education sector community engagement but that added to the discourse include the work of Bob Jessop (1998) on regional economies, Basil Bernstein (1996) on weakening classification boundaries within educational institutions and the work of Christakis and Brahms (2003) *"Boundary Spanning Dialogue for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agora's"*, but none found provide a glimpse of the holistic process with the capacity to operationalise our new systemic model.

### ***Australian Research***

In Australia, The Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS) published in 2003 *"Community and Campus: the benefits of engagement"* a document that details 29 Australian examples and case studies of higher education and community engagement.

These examples, (or exemplars) as explained by the authors Garlick and Pryor represent a cross-section of whole university involvement and indicate where community engagement is integrated into the university culture. The report breaks the engagements down into the following six case study areas: Economic Development and Industry; Sustainable Development; Social Development; Health and Wellbeing; Cultural Development and Student Access.

They represent examples in which the institutions have worked with their identified communities to generate collaborative regional development. Reviewing them it became clear that each of these examples represented working models of the engagement in their unique and individual areas but my unresolved question remains: did the frame allow the systemic directions from MCEETYA to be understood, contextualised and operationalised?

Various aspects began to surface across the examples of the collaborations, engagements and partnerships particularly the systemic reforms from the Swinburne University of Technology, Lilydale Campus and the Centre for Rural Communities Inc from Monash University, both in Victoria and the Somerville Collection from Charles Sturt University in New South Wales. In these programs collaboration was broad based.

Other relevant Australian work has been presented under the banner of the Australian University Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) and significant works are also found within the regional studies, planning, learning communities, economic development disciplines and literature with the 1999 work of Keane and Allison titled *"The intersection of the learning region and local and regional economy development: Analysing the role of higher education"* prominent.

### ***Interface and Boundary Spanning***

The meeting and subsequent discussions with Janelle Allison one of the authors of the Keane and Allison (1999) paper alerted me to the existence of an emerging body of published work relating to community and regional engagement and the provision of the point of departure, specifically the idea of an *interface* between the University and Community. What was this interface? This article and other work by the authors lay the foundation for the evaluation of community engagement in subsequent papers.

The term interface also surfaced in Burkhardt (2002) in which it is stated that *"The adaptive capacity of higher education is not only rooted in the ability for institutions to change one by one, but in a system level capacity which depends upon a specific form of leadership. This leadership process is constructed at the boundary between the higher education at large and its interface with society."* Burkhardt goes on to suggest that the link between a system wide response to higher education engagement requires a leadership capacity that functions at the level of ideas and values rather than a defined organisational framework.

This was the link to the QUT and NCEP process; with institutional community interface that function at the level of ideas and values. As outlined above the NCEP had adopted a cross-sectoral leadership role in regional education and learning and was articulating and operationalising a shared vision. The NCEP and QUT were operating as Burkhardt suggested at the interface boundary. This raised the notion of a symbolic domain in the equation.

### **Conclusion**

As outlined in the abstract section this paper proposes that a gap exists around the process of engagement specifically pertaining to the nature of the mechanism of engagement and how the process occurs. In Australia the systemic education policy framework has been evolving since the middle of 2002 and is now filtering into the operational rhetoric, strategic planning and directions of education providers.

No longer can it be claimed that being engaged with your diverse communities is anything other than a mainstream objective for the education sector and in particular universities. As with QUT the articulated strategic direction of the university closely aligns to the systemic policy framework.

This paper begins to construct the contextual basis for the activities and intended outcomes and starts to shed new light on what the policy makers have articulated system wide is needed to occur if universities and the education sector more generally are to engage with their constituent communities. The commencement of construction of the programme theory and logic model has shown that a systemic context for higher education community engagement exists and that the rhetoric, language and policy impetus is in place to implement the intended outcomes. However, also identified both from the articulated policy framework and a review of community engagement research and published works in Australia and internationally is that there is no readily available or transposable prevailing frame or model for how to do education sector community engagement.

A process mechanism that leads to rewards for mutually beneficial cross-sectoral and community collaboration, co-operation and resource sharing is a necessity. A necessity because the various co-operative aspects that now form part of the policy landscape and have both programme benefits on delivery like access to additional funding pools as well as tacit long term outcomes must be measured and evaluated.

Emerging from the reflection on the NCEP processes involving QUT is one way to fill the process gap and transcend the strategic operational divide and present a best practice operational mechanism. Rationalised against the theoretical backdrop of Benedict Anderson's (1983) work on "Imagined Communities" and McNeill (2001) supplementary concepts about "Spaces of Engagement" is a proposal that the process of community engagement is currently working for around fifty regional engagements involving QUT and has been for the last 3 years. The process creates a place in which discussion can take place outside pre-existing internal and external boundaries. A place in which discourse, communication and information dissemination can lead to a shared language and vision and potentially collaborative action.

When this "space of engagement" created initially as an "imagined community" begins to bring together participants from across their internal silos or an organisational boundary, engagement begins around shared ideas or vision. Anecdotally, flowing from the existing regional engagements of this type involving QUT additional benefits seem also to emerge as the participants return to their home silos or organisations with the collaborative ideas and visions apparently to continue the collaborative cross boundary discourse and communications. This horizontal mirroring of the higher-level engagement brings in the work of Basil Bernstein (1996) in the weakening of classification boundaries in education.

### **Next Steps**

Detailed in this paper has been the strategic systemic and institutional view designed to ground education sector community engagement within its legislative and policy frame. The next paper will explore further the symbolic dimension within which an "Imagined Community" and "Space of Engagement" have been created. Elaborating the interface that links the individual, institution, system and society at the point of engagement and the development of the boundary spanning roles and process required to maintain the Imagined Community a Space of Engagement (ICaSE).

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